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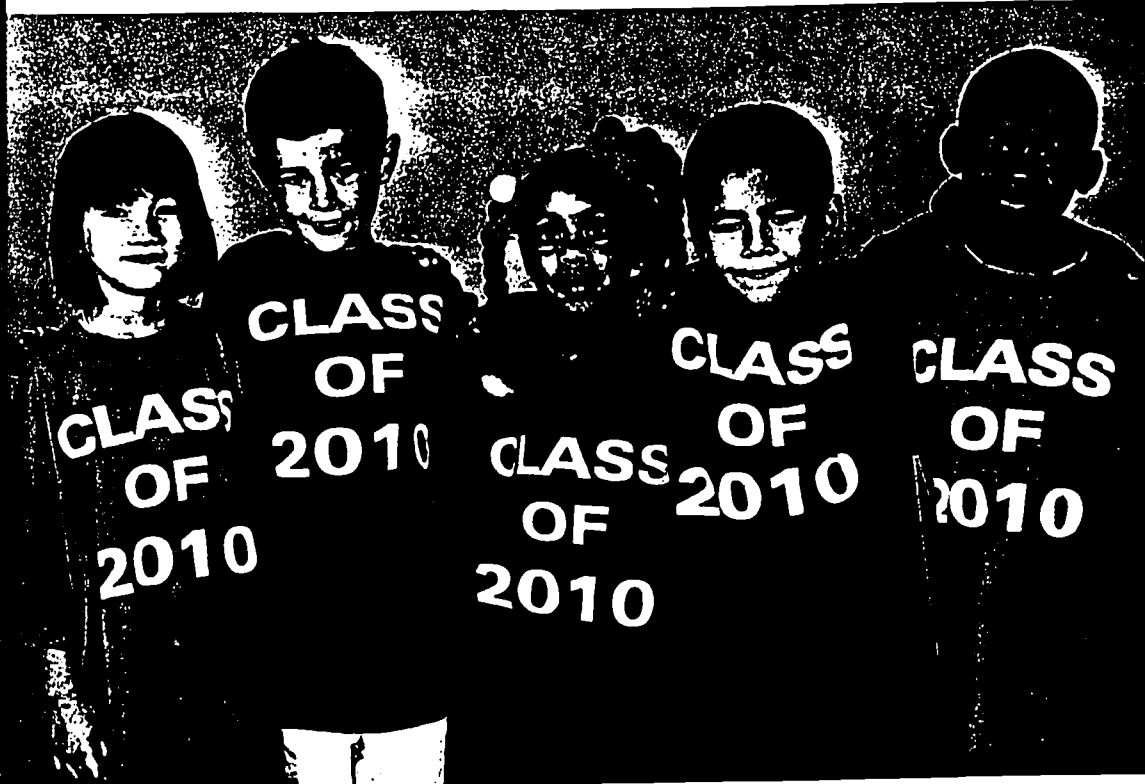
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ABSTRACT

As part of the Community Vision Initiative, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation conducted a series of educational forums that included 94 guided discussions and focus groups. About 400 to 500 citizens and educators participated in at least 1 of the discussions. Eight major categories emerged as concerns for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools: (1) shared core values; (2) quality education for all children; (3) equity across the board; (4) teachers and teaching matter for student achievement; (5) parent involvement; (6) community involvement; (7) action and accountability; and (8) the environment for education. This report presents summaries of discussions about each of these issues. Recognizing these community concerns is a first step that must be followed by processes of engagement, setting priorities, determining a focus, and program implementation. Appendixes contain plans for scheduled meetings and a list of components of the Community Vision Initiative completed to date. (SLD)

Putting the **Public** in **Public** Education



Preliminary Community Vision

WorkBook

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Written by Courtenay Gibbs, Ph.D., and Tom Bradbury
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation,
Charlotte, North Carolina. January 2000.

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January 2000

Dear Community Members,

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System is huge - the 23rd largest in America - in a sprawling, growing, changing community. People value many different things. Different children need many different things. One size does not fit all, in education or community vision.

Whatever the rules for student and teacher assignment, a huge number of children will attend our public schools. Education is not simply a matter of attendance policies. It is a burning issue across the country, in places far from our local disputes. Judge McMillan didn't make the debate go away; Judge Potter won't; the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals won't.

There is enormous disagreement on specifics. Some people are for busing, some for neighborhood schools. Some people stress the basics, some emphasize the love of learning. But there is wide agreement that all children must be educated, that they must be prepared for life and work as well as for state tests.

That is what we at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation learned as our delegates asked people throughout this community about public education. This report is the draft of our findings

I emphasize draft because the Community Vision for Quality Public Education is a dialogue; there is not a last word that sets things in stone. That's why we are sponsoring an Education Summit and more discussions. Such involvement is how a community vision is developed and validated. So read what we have learned. Add to it and challenge it - at the Education Summit, in guided discussions, in letters and on our web site (www.cmef.org).

The result will be a statement of what the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community wants and values in public education, a statement of what citizens here are willing to vote for, what they are willing to spend on. The aim is not a nicer slogan but better schools, offering a better future for our children and for our community.

Sincerely,

Tom Bradbury
President

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation

Vision for Our Future, An Introduction

The Community Vision Initiative, launched by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation in May 1999, is engaging our community in dialogue to create a long-term vision and community ownership for quality public education in Mecklenburg County. Support for community engagement around public education is strong. In the 1999 Annual Community Assessment, 69% of respondents strongly supported the creation of a community vision or long-term action plan for quality public education in the 21st century.

Dr. Eric Smith, Superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, has endorsed the Community Vision Initiative. In a September 28, 1999 letter to the Education Foundation, Dr. Smith wrote, "An engaged public, a public that makes quality education its own, is invaluable." Likewise, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce endorsed this Initiative through its Advantage Carolina *CMS Partners for School Reform*:

Community Visioning for Quality Public Education will enhance the work of the school system through the meaningful engagement of representatives from the public and private sectors, community groups and organizations working together to develop a vision and long-range plan in partnership with the district.

Your family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues began this Initiative last summer by participating in a series of educational forums. These "delegates" conducted 94 guided discussions throughout the community and participated in focus groups with the Education Foundation. About 400-500 people participated in at least one of these discussions.

Guided discussions, sometimes called study circles, are groups of 5-15 people who agree to meet together several times to learn about a social or political issue in a democratic and collaborative way. Complex issues are broken down into manageable subdivisions, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Reading material serves to stimulate the discussion and provides a common reference point.

Eight major categories emerged:

- Shared core values
- Quality education for ALL children
- Equity across the board
- Teachers and teaching matter for student achievement
- Parent involvement is key
- Community involvement is vital
- Action & Accountability
- Environment for education

We, members of the community, have been asking - What's important? What needs to be done? There is agreement and disagreement. There always will be. But, we also discovered that despite

conflicts about busing, diversity, and neighborhood schools, we share some core values upon which we can rebuild trust - in our community and in our public schools.

Voluntary and highly participatory, guided discussions assist participants in confronting challenging issues and making difficult choices, engage citizens in public and organizational concerns, and often lead to social and political action by individuals and by the group.

The focus in the media and in the general public obviously has been student assignment and diversity, busing and desegregation. Now, it is time to talk about academic achievement. Hundreds of community members, like you, are saying that academic achievement is at the core of schooling. When we, all of us, talk about educational issues - equity, teachers, parents, community involvement, standards and expectations, and accountability - it must be in the context of improving student academic achievement.

Focusing on academic achievement, however, does not mean simply putting aside the issues bound up in busing, diversity, and desegregation. We have an extraordinary history upon which to build our future. In the second edition of *The Dream Long Deferred*, Frye Gaillard asserts that "the intertwining futures of desegregation and public education are now in the hands of the people of Charlotte."

Community visioning is a participatory, democratic process for creating a community vision for quality public education. It expands our ability as a community to implement that vision by stressing dialogues, collaboration, and, ultimately, action.

We do not have a Community Vision yet. But, because of the investment and commitment of your family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues, our community has a solid foundation from which to launch a second phase of difficult, candid, forward-thinking, and community-wide discussions.

What follows here is a report of what our community cares about - what we say is important about equity, teachers and student achievement, parent and community involvement, and accountability. There are wonderful stories to tell. There are also problems. But our focus here is not on celebration or despair. Our focus is on improvement.

Another federal judge has created another crossroads for the community, another moment of truth . . . an era has come to an end, but what exactly is the nature of the change - the end of busing and race-based assignments - the abandonment of the dream of equity and fairness? As the people of Charlotte struggle with a new reality in the schools, this is the question still waiting for an answer. Nobody knows what it will be, or whether the community will find common ground. The legacy of the seventies offers glimmers of hope. But this is a new generation in Charlotte, divided once again, and in the turbulent aftermath of Judge Potter's ruling, the hard work of healing has not yet begun.

Adapted from Frye Gaillard *The Dream Long Deferred* (2nd edition)

Note: The terms "we" and "our" - used often throughout this document - do not mean the Education Foundation. "We" and "our" mean the community, speaking in guided discussions, report forms, focus groups, and the Community Assessment.

Both the Community Vision and the Community Assessment are referred to throughout this report. Please note that the Community Assessment refers to the annual poll conducted by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation. This is a poll of community attitudes towards and perceptions of public education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Also, the Education Foundation conducts focus groups as a part of the assessment process; these are referred to as Community Assessment focus groups and are separate from the Community Vision focus groups.

Guiding Principles

The Education Foundation's insert of Sunday, January 9, 2000 in the Charlotte Observer, acknowledged that people are tired, that parents especially are frustrated. Despite our fatigue and frustrations, we care and must continue to care about public education. Improving the quality of public schools is vitally important to this community. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation's Annual Community Assessment, the majority of survey respondents have consistently ranked public education as first or second in importance from among five community issues.

Why should we care about public schools, about an education summit, about a community vision for quality public education? Because . . .

- ✓ Every child is entitled to a quality public education.
- ✓ Quality public schools are crucial to the sustained vitality of American democracy and our local economies.
- ✓ A supportive and involved public is crucial to the success of our public schools.
- ✓ Education is everyone's responsibility.
- ✓ If education were treated as everyone's responsibility, there would be a community strategy, not a school strategy, for educating every single child; everyone would have a role to play.
- ✓ A healthy public life consists of social trust and networks of civic associations that result in high levels of voluntary cooperation . . . relationships that run among equals rather than between haves and have-nots.

These have been the Education Foundation's guiding principles in launching the Community Vision Initiative. They are influenced in large part by the work of David Mathews, *Is There A Public For Public Schools?*, and the work of the Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education, notably its 1998 report, *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*. Both David Mathews and the Annenberg Institute are among the leaders of a growing nationwide movement towards community engagement around public education and other pertinent social issues.

<p>I am so glad we are doing this Initiative. If I had not become involved I would still be thinking about education in terms of my child and only my child. Now, my perspective and understanding are broader. Of course my child matters – but so does the big picture.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Delegate, Focus Group 1999</i></p>

Category 1: Shared Core Values

Members of the community who were involved in guided discussions and focus groups would by and large agree with the *Guiding Principles*. In addition to those and despite our many differences and disagreements, a set of shared core values has emerged from our guided discussions. This means that there is a common denominator upon which we can build, or rebuild, relationships and trust within our community.

These values, listed below, are not exclusive of each other. For example, candid and consistent communication contributes to trust. Further, these values are implicit in the discussions that led to the major categories of our preliminary community vision. This is why *Shared Core Values* is considered a category in and of itself.

- ALL children deserve quality education.
- Equity is necessary in facilities, resources, and funding.
- Trust is the foundation of a healthy community.
- Candid and consistent communication is critical.
- Education belongs to the community.
- There is a state and national context into which we fit; we are not the great state of Mecklenburg in education.
- Learning is a rich and complex process; it is not just about the ABCs.

The Education Foundation also believes that shared core values help us to understand each other and to better approach the issues and challenges ahead.

Questions for consideration:

1. What do you think of the shared core values?
2. What would you change or add? How would you prioritize these values?
3. How do these values connect to each other?
4. How do these values help us to better understand each other?
5. How might these values influence how we approach educational issues?
6. What concrete, practical actions could we take to reinforce these shared core values in our school system and community?

When students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other community members talk and listen to each other, they gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing education and how to meet them. Through dialogue, community members become better prepared to take individual and collective action. In the process, they also build the bonds of community that are essential to improving education. *Study Circles Resource Center*

Notes

Category 2: Quality Education for ALL Children

Quality education for ALL children is an umbrella category because it encompasses other issues like equity, instruction, achievement, teachers, and so on. However, in our guided discussions there was wide agreement that the future be one in which the quality of education in our schools improves for all children. All children means the poor, middle class, and rich; those with learning or physical disabilities; those who are gifted academically, artistically, or athletically; those with limited English proficiency; and those who traditionally drop out because the system is not meeting their needs. All children must be held to high academic expectations and standards and provided with meaningful and relevant learning opportunities. High academic achievement is the centerpiece of quality education. Other issues ought to be examined with regard to how they can improve and promote children's academic achievement.

In guided discussions, we also identified some barriers to improving the quality of education in our schools:

- Societal factors that inhibit high academic achievement: for example, poverty and economic disparities, parents who for a variety of reasons can not be substantially involved in their child's education, lack of quality community involvement and resources, and politics or the lack of political responsiveness to school issues.
- School-based factors that inhibit high academic achievement: for example, curriculum that is not challenging, poor quality instruction, ineffective discipline policies, and large classes.

Questions for consideration:

1. How should we measure quality in education?
2. How can we overcome the barriers to improving the quality of public education?

<p>The Vision is to ensure that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System becomes the premier urban, integrated school system in the nation in which all student acquire the knowledge, skills and values necessary to live rich and full lives as productive and enlightened members of society.</p>	<p><i>CMS Building Dreams Vision</i></p>
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Category 3: Equity across the Board

Like quality, equity is not a subject for debate. In guided discussions, we agreed that there must be equity in instructional excellence, facilities, resources, and funding. Glaring disparities are not acceptable. We also agreed that ensuring equity, however, will take a lot of work for which we all bear responsibility.

A further complication is that there is a great deal of confusion about what an equitable school system might look like, particularly with regard to funding issues. We talked about:

- Resource allocation and why some schools appear to be underfunded
- School funding and budgeting processes
- What equity really means: Does it mean the same for everyone or more for some in order to level the playing field and raise student achievement?

PTA funding is an area of great concern. We perceive it to be a tremendous factor of inequity, varying widely across the school system.

The 1999 Community Assessment reinforces what emerged in guided discussions: strong support for improving equity of facilities and resources and concerns about inequitable school funding. Community Assessment respondents indicated strong support for increased funding in a variety of areas for CMS. But, since 1996, they have also given CMS two of the three lowest ratings from among 14 items on “providing information to the community on how tax dollars are being spent on public education” and “using tax dollars efficiently.”

Equity is not just about facilities and funding. It also about trust, candor, and good teaching. (Again, results from the 1999 Community Assessment echoed this sentiment from guided discussions.)

- There is a great deal of distrust towards the school system and school officials as a result of the desegregation court case. This results in part from the mixed messages of the court case data, on the one hand, and the celebrations about improved test scores and ABCs results, on the other. Can both be true? Is there spin doctoring? What’s the real story?
- Perceived inconsistencies in teaching quality across our schools is a hot topic. Inconsistencies affect student achievement. Often new teachers are placed with our kids who have the greatest needs. No one wins.

For many of us and especially in the aftermath of the recent desegregation court case, equity is also about diversity or the fear of a decrease of diversity in our schools and the long-term and perhaps unforeseeable consequences. Diversity in this context encompasses not just race, but socioeconomics as well. There is a perception that with neighborhood schools and the end of

busing for racial integration, we are forcing ourselves to make a choice between proximity and racial diversity or socioeconomic diversity. Some members of our community represent each end of that spectrum. Many of us are in the middle, accepting the advantages of proximity and fearing the loss of diversity.

Questions for consideration:

1. Are your greatest concerns about equity addressed here? If so, where? If not, what's missing?
2. What does equity really mean?
3. How can we clarify our questions with regard to school funding? And, who can answer them?
4. How can PTA fund-raising be revised so as not to be a source of financial inequity among schools? Should it even matter?
5. Is it possible to achieve racial and socioeconomic diversity, as well as other types of diversity, in a neighborhood-school organization? How?
6. What do you think is the best way to assure or promote racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity?

I see our system moving towards inner-city schools populated predominantly by poor children and suburban schools populated mostly by the affluent and those with political clout. I fear that the voices that will be heard in the future will be the ones speaking about overcrowding in the growth areas and not about the less-than-adequate facilities, resources, and teachers in the center city . . . additionally, our children will be educated in homogenous settings . . . these same children will grow up to become community leaders but will lack an understanding of the true makeup of the community.

Community Member, From "What must Mecklenburg address in schools, education?"

Notes

Category 4: Teachers and Teaching Matter for Student Achievement

In guided discussions, we agreed that *'what we teach, how we teach, and who is teaching'* are interrelated. For example, quality instruction is not possible without quality teachers. Fundamental to this is, of course, a challenging curriculum. Again, participants in 1999 Community Assessment focus groups said that curriculum, teaching, and teachers are intertwined. The quality of each depends upon the quality of all.

What we teach: The curriculum

There is a great deal of disagreement around the focus of the curriculum. What ought to be emphasized? Workplace education? Vocational education? Basic skills? Liberal arts? Technology? Character education? Multicultural education? If there is an area of consensus it is that students must be able to apply what they learn in "real life" "real work" situations. We believe that education also includes other things: developing a love of learning, problem-solving skills, life-long learning skills, and creative thinking. We care about work ethic and diversity.

Preparation for the workforce/workplace, technology, and vocational training were areas of lively debate in some of the Community Vision focus groups. We agreed that while it is a challenge for our schools to meet the needs of all our children, we would meet those needs better and more efficiently if there were good programs for all children throughout the schools. In the 1999 Community Assessment, 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CMS needs more vocational and technical training programs. And, like Community Vision guided discussions and focus groups, Community Assessment focus group participants discussed the challenges of meeting all students' needs.

How we teach: Instruction and achievement

There is overall consensus about instruction and achievement. High expectations and standards are needed for all children. All students must meet the minimum state academic standards but just meeting the minimum is not enough. Approximately 64% of 1999 Community Assessment respondents perceived that low expectations contribute to low student achievement.

How we measure student learning and evaluate schools are areas of deep concern. In guided discussions, we asked each other whether the current tests were a relevant assessment of learning. Do we test too much? Do we teach to the test? But, in the 1999 Community Assessment, 49% of respondents believed that improving test scores is of the utmost importance and 52% that not teaching information and skills covered on standardized tests contributes to low student achievement. Paradoxically, 65% of respondents also believed that CMS is only concerned with test scores and not with what children are learning.

Who is teaching: Teachers

There is agreement that while setting high qualifications for teachers is a priority, defining good teaching or a good teacher is difficult. At the heart of this is a deep concern about inconsistencies across our schools in quality instruction, in student achievement, and in resources for schools and teachers to improve student learning.

In order to recruit and retain top teachers, we must assess and improve working conditions. "Working conditions" includes a spectrum of issues in addition to compensation and benefits: planning time; support, supervision, and mentoring; meaningful and relevant professional development; and teaching assignment. 89% of 1999 Community Assessment participants and many community members involved in the fall 1999 Community Vision activities agreed that CMS needs more money to recruit and retain good teachers. In guided discussions, many of us also discussed the need to improve working conditions for teachers and suggested that salary is often less of a reason to leave the profession than some of the other issues.

Questions for consideration:

1. How can we meet the needs of a wide variety of students in a system as large as ours is?
2. Should there be one main goal of the curriculum? Or, can the curriculum be designed so as to incorporate several goals, for example, basic skills and higher-order thinking?
3. Whose responsibility is it to teach work ethic and citizenship? Ought these be included in the curriculum or could schools be redesigned to include these topics in other ways – through community service requirements, service learning, extracurricular activities?
4. How do you account for the variety of responses about testing? Do they contradict each other? Support each other? Why or why not?
5. How can we help parents and the general public decide what the teaching standards ought to be? How can we ensure that these standards are met in our classrooms?
6. How can we better support teachers?

Our curriculum as it is currently does not validate those kids who do not go down the traditional path after high school to a 4-year college or university . . . the kids in my guided discussion group were telling me that the curriculum isn't relevant, that it did not and does not prepare them for the workplace. *Delegate, Focus Group, 1999*

Notes

Categories 5 & 6:
Parent Involvement is Key
Community Involvement is Vital

In guided discussions, we agreed that parent involvement is the key to student achievement. We also believe that students, parents, schools, and the community are all responsible for student learning. The time has come, we say, to rethink the ways schools have traditionally engaged parents, businesses, and the community at-large. This may involve developing new ways for parents and other community members to become involved in schools and committing to parent and community education.

- Schools and teachers may need to go to parents or be increasingly flexible in scheduling parent-teacher conferences.
- People are as important to schools as funding. To address parent and community involvement, businesses can establish family-friendly or school-friendly policies that enable parents to be more involved in their children's education and that support, recognize, and even reward employee school involvement.

The Community Assessment findings reinforce our guided discussions. 83% of 1999 Community Assessment respondents believe that achievement is linked to a student's home environment, specifically that the lack of parental involvement contributes greatly to low student achievement. In the 1999 Community Assessment and Community Vision focus groups, community members describe family participation in a child's education as one of the top factors contributing to the child's success in school. In discussing why some parents fail to get involved in their child's education, we suggested that:

- Many parents are too busy and too tired to take an active part.
- Parents can be intimidated by schools, particularly the use of technology in the classroom.
- Some parents lack basic parenting skills.
- There are high levels of stress in some households, households with difficult circumstances.

We are increasingly appreciative that education is not simply the job of teachers or parents. The public and private sectors and individual community members are committed to quality public education. The Chamber, among others, has been working on its initiative *CMS Partners for School Reform* in which business representatives as well as the Education Foundation have been engaged. The Chamber has further asked those representatives to become involved with the Community Vision Initiative.

A pivotal component for successful parent and community involvement that emerged from guided discussions, and one of our shared core values, is clear, consistent two-way communication - in and out of the schools and the school system. By and large, members of the

community want to get involved but are frequently hindered by poor or unclear communications on the part of the schools and school system and by a lack of trust that their participation really matters. One example of innovative two-way communication is the guided discussion format. Throughout discussions and focus groups, however, we expressed concern that this effort not becomes simply another report gathering dust. We agreed that maintaining the momentum and sustaining participation and commitment would be a challenge. But, we also agreed that there is a lot going on in our community already. Communication and collaboration can help us to learn about the work underway and to get involved.

Questions for consideration:

1. What can we do in our own homes to improve education? What can we do in our places of employment? What can we do as individuals?
2. What is already going on in the community in terms of improving education? What organizations (businesses, civic organizations, nonprofits) are involved in improving education? What other organizations might help, and how can we approach them?
3. What can people get involved in now? Are there better ways or other opportunities for people to get involved?
4. What types of communication do we have now? How can we improve our communication?
5. How can we engage our local and state political leaders in educational issues and improvement?
6. What responsibility do we as community members have for the children who are without stable family environments?

At this important time in the life of our community I encourage you to take a long, hard look at how your organization is supporting the cause of education. Do you provide your employees who are parents with release time to visit schools? Do you have a business partnership?

Letter from Allen Tate, Chairman, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, November 1999

Notes

Categories 7 & 8: Environment for Education Action & Accountability

Environment for Education includes a wide range of topics and issues that affect student learning, schools, the school system, and our community. The environment is the greater context within which we are discussing education. This includes what is happening in our local community as well as what is happening on a state and national level, all of which affect us here. For example, the topics for discussion at the 1999 National Education Summit were accountability, student achievement, teacher quality, choice, and public support. All of these issues emerged in our guided discussions as well. And we agreed that over the next decade these issues will affect us more than ever before.

The 1999 National Education Summit was the third of its kind. In 1989, then President George Bush and many of our nation's governors held the first National Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. In 1996, the governors came together again with prominent business leaders. The second National Summit was held at the IBM Executive Conference Center in Palisades, New York. In October 1999, governors and business leaders met again in Palisades for the third National Education Summit. They asked some of the very same questions we are asking:

- What changes need to be made within our schools to ensure that all students meet new academic standards?
- How do we prepare teachers to teach to higher standards and raise standards for teachers as well?
- What kinds of rewards and consequences can we put in place for schools and students so that they take standards seriously?
- How can we provide greater choice and diversity while maintaining strict accountability?
- How can we ensure public support?

When we talk about the proper learning environment, we are talking about more than just the school buildings and resources. In the 1999 Community Assessment, survey respondents and focus group participants consider safety and discipline at least as important as facilities and supplies in creating the best educational environment for our children. In our Community Vision guided discussions, we linked safety and discipline to student learning and achievement:

- Students and teachers must feel safe at school.
- Schools must have clear discipline policies that work.
- Smaller class sizes - and smaller schools - may lead to better classroom management and, hence, safety.
- Smaller class sizes may also enable teachers to provide more individual attention to students and, therefore, to be able to better monitor and guide

their learning.

We also talked at length about the overall organization of our school system and whether schools and the school building can become more a part of the community and less a place to which our children are sent during the day:

- Holistic approaches to schooling and learning are an example of this. These can mean actually rethinking school as a community center of sorts, physically linking multiple services and opportunities to draw the community to schoolhouses.
- It can also mean modeling collaboration. If we can not physically link services, shouldn't we at minimum work together more closely? Parents, schools, and social service agencies need to work together to ensure that the children who sit in our classrooms are ready and able to learn.

Like our core shared values, *Action and Accountability* were the underpinning of most discussions. We must begin working towards action, not simply talking. While talking, dialogue, is an integral component of public engagement, process can not be a substitute for action. Action and accountability must become part of our dialogue.

Who must act? Who is accountable? In guided discussions, we identified the following individuals and groups:

- School system, administrators, principals, teachers, and staff
- School board
- Families and students
- Businesses
- Community leaders
- Elected officials
- Community members
- Media
- Education advocacy organizations
- Human service agencies
- Faith community

While we agree that we are all accountable, we also agree that accountability may vary depending upon the issue. At the heart of clarifying our roles and responsibilities is clear, consistent, and candid two-way communication, a *Shared Core Value*.

In guided discussions, we suggested some specific responsibilities. For example, the School Board is responsible for ongoing assessment and the media is responsible for accurate “lay-friendly” reporting. Of particular interest is the role of real estate agencies, as they seem to serve as ambassadors for people moving into our community. There is a concern, even suspicion, that real estate agencies have a great deal of power in directing newcomers to particular geographic areas and schools, even to private schools.

Questions for consideration:

1. What do you think of the suggested holistic approaches to schooling and learning?
2. In discussions of action and accountability, leadership and vision were not explicitly addressed. But the Education Foundation believes strongly that leadership and vision must play a key role in a community vision for quality public education.

Since 1996, Community Assessment findings have indicated that we have the greatest confidence in those decision-makers closest to students (teachers, parents, principals, and the Superintendent) and the least confidence in business leaders and elected officials other than the school board.

What do you think? How do you define “strong leadership and vision”? In our list of who must act and who is accountable from the previous page, what kind of leadership and vision ought these individuals or groups take?

3. What is the relationship between action/accountability and leadership/vision?
4. How can we encourage collaboration between our schools and other organizations and citizens?
5. How do we translate our ideas about responsibility and accountability into action?

Social activism is frustrating and not always easy. But . . . it's a richer way to live, even if it's hard. . . . isn't it better to work for something that's worthwhile? To be glad we aspired to make things better instead of being ashamed we didn't try? All around us, every day, are people who do act. They had to overcome the doubts and recognize, "If not me, then who?" . . . they had to give themselves permission to not know everything. We don't have all the answers. We just have to get out there and engage with our fellow human beings.

Adapted from Paul Loeb, *Soul of a Citizen*

Notes

Challenges

Identifying shared core values and community concerns is an important beginning, but it is not enough. In order to move forward we must address and work through a variety of challenges. Among the challenges we identified through our guided discussions are the following:

- ☛ To engage the broad community in the Community Vision Initiative.
- ☛ To determine what is important – what we need and want to do and how we will measure and assess our progress.
- ☛ To move beyond busing and student assignment and focus on student learning and achievement.
- ☛ To implement our Community Vision.

*Engage
Prioritize
Focus
Implement*

Engage

Engaging the broad community means reaching out to those individuals, organizations, and businesses that have yet to be involved, including them in Community Vision guided discussions and focus groups and/or going to their houses of worship, meetings, and places of businesses to lead dialogue sessions. Engaging the broad community means being able to say with certainty that what we have “visioned” does indeed belong to our community.

Prioritize

Determining what is important, what we need and want to do, and how, means moving towards a deeper level of dialogue, a level that includes action and accountability. In many ways, our conversations thus far have been too broad and too nice. We must start to clarify issues, prioritize, determine sound and measurable solutions, and accept responsibility. Our conversations have, however, been a necessary first step in creating this foundation, the preliminary Community Vision. And for many of us these conversations and interaction have been tremendously rewarding.

Focus

Undoubtedly, we seek and need stability. But, moving beyond the recent desegregation court case and the appeals process will be a challenge. Ultimately, though, learning is about what happens in the classroom (real, virtual, community-based, or business-based). It is about what happens among students and between students and their teachers and mentors.

Implement

Like *Quality Public Education for ALL Children* and *Action and Accountability*, these challenges are not separate goals to be reached individually and then checked off our list. We must work on them simultaneously. Community visioning is not a quick fix. As we discussed in guided discussions, it is a long-term effort towards systemic reform. Therefore, implementing our vision will involve setting short-term and long-term goals and establishing collaboration.

Questions for consideration:

1. What other challenges do/will we face? How can we work through them?
2. What other challenges have we already faced and what can we learn from them?
3. How do we engage the broad community and move forward in this work?
4. How can we assure ourselves and others that the Community Vision Initiative is not simply another report that will ultimately collect dust?
5. What are the strengths of our community and our schools? What assets have gone untapped? How can we put those assets to work?
6. What steps do we want to take? What type of support or help do we need to take these steps?
7. Where and how do we start?

What we need to improve schools are . . . some old-fashioned democratic virtues – courageous leadership, greater clarity and consensus about goals, and many kinds of cooperative ventures to develop new strategies.

Adapted from Tony Wagner, "Improving high schools: The case for new goals and strategies," quoted in The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Education in our Communities

Notes

Appendix A: Next Steps

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation Annual Meeting and Education Summit, Tuesday, January 25, 2000, 7:00 a.m. -3:30 p.m.

Goals:

1. Present the findings from fall guided discussions and give a greater number of Charlotte-Mecklenburg citizens the opportunity for input in the Community Vision process
2. Launch spring guided discussions and other community engagement activities
3. Provide opportunities to visit with local education organizations

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation Annual Community Assessment (spring)

Goals:

1. Examine community awareness, perceptions, and priorities for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
2. Track changes in attitudes
3. Validate findings of and measure perceptions of progress towards the Community Vision

Community Engagement Phase 2, February 2000-May 2000

Goals:

1. Engage the broad community in refining the Vision
2. Move dialogues to a deeper level with an emphasis on *engagement, prioritization, focus, and implementation*

Activities:

1. Community guided-discussions/study circles
2. Delegate-led discussion sessions with organizations
3. Community focus groups
4. Education advocacy organization round-tables
5. Additional activities as identified and requested

Measuring and Reporting Progress

Goals:

1. Maintain the momentum through community engagement activities, programs, and education summits every 2 to 3 years
2. Measure progress towards achieving the Vision using the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation's Annual Community Assessment and other mechanisms
3. Report progress and status through the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation's State of Education Report, annually beginning fall 2000

Appendix B: Process & Methodology

1. The process to date of the Community Vision Initiative has included the following components:

April 1999	Initial Invitation Letter (1000+ mailed)
May 1999	Release of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation 1999 Community Assessment & Call to Action for Community Vision for Quality Public Education
July-August 1999	Education Series (Attendance 354)
August 1999	Survey I (133 of 354 Returned)
August 1999	Delegate Training (120 Participated)
September 1999	Optional Delegate Review Sessions (12 Attended)
October 1999	Fall Delegate Roster (140 Signed up)
September-November 1999	Guided Discussions (57 of 140 Delegates Conducted 94 Guided Discussions)
October 1999	Survey II (42 of 140 Returned)
October-November 1999	Focus Groups (44 Delegates Participated)
October 1999	Questionnaire/Form, <i>What must Mecklenburg address in schools, education?</i> (70 Forms Submitted)
November –December 1999	Data Analysis
January 2000	Insert in Charlotte Observer and Report, <i>Preliminary Community Vision Workbook</i> ; Education Summit

2. Please see *Appendix A: Next Steps* for anticipated next steps.
3. The primary sources of data collection were the Guided Discussion Report Forms, Focus Groups, and the 1999 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation Community Assessment. Other sources included Optional Delegate Review Sessions, Surveys I and II, and the questionnaire/form, *What must Mecklenburg address in schools, education?* Data Analysis was conducted by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation and Public Impact.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation is an independent advocate that works to empower the community to improve and ensure quality public education for every child.

The mission of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation is to define the issues and advocate for the changes required to permanently improve the quality of public education in Mecklenburg County.

We believe that quality public education includes the following interdependent elements:

- **Strong Leadership and Vision**
- **Quality Instruction**
- **Clear Standards, Assessment and Accountability**
- **Adequate and Equitable Resources**
- **Family Participation**
- **Community Involvement**

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*“Learn as if you
were to live forever.”*

– Ghandi



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